

ESTHER PETERSON

- i 1906 – 1997**
- i Consumer Rights Advocate/Politician**
- i Senior Citizen Advocate**

Esther Peterson exemplified a powerful and gracious woman. Peterson joined the staff of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers in the late 1930s and later became the legislative representative of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department. In 1961, as Assistant Secretary of Labor for the Kennedy Administration, she achieved the creation of the first presidential commission on women, headed initially by Eleanor Roosevelt. This pioneering group for the first time focused federal attention on the status and condition of women in the workplace.

Esther was also a strong consumer rights advocate. Her innovations include things now taken for granted such as laundry instructions attached to clothes, unit pricing in grocery aisles, and many requirements guaranteeing the safety of workers. Esther lobbied so hard for consumers' rights that the Advertising Federation of America called her "the most dangerous thing since Ghengis Khan."

Esther Peterson was born on December 9, 1906 in Provo, Utah. She received a Bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University in 1927 and a Master's degree at Columbia Teachers College in New York City in 1930. Esther married Oliver A. Peterson. Together, they raised four children. Esther served under President Johnson and President Carter as an advisor in consumer affairs. Esther could bridge the gaps between trade unions, consumer groups and government officials, because she worked for all of them and they trusted her. She persuaded the International Organization of Consumers Unions at the United Nations to pass the Consumer Protection Guidelines. These guidelines have helped to pass new consumer laws on three continents.

In her later years of life she helped to increase knowledge and power of seniors. In 1985 she founded the United Seniors Health Cooperative (USHC), this organization helped to increase seniors' access to affordable, quality consumer information and community services. The issues that most concerned the USHC were Medicare, Medigap insurance, welfare reform, financial security, community services, and the problems of lower-income seniors. Esther was also a United States representative to the United Nations, where she fought to publish a list of products banned in one country and still being sold in another. Esther strongly believed that seniors should be an ethical and political force.

Esther was strong politically all her life. She was a presidential advisor and chief consumer advocate at 70 and she worked long after her term expired. Her autobiography, "Restless", explains her character. Esther is quoted as saying, "I am an old lady in my ninth decade of life, and I believe I still have a lot to give. You don't have to stop contributing when your hair turns white, in fact you may have more to give if you're able to build on your experiences and your past." She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1981. Esther passed away in Washington D. C. on December 20, 1997. Esther Peterson was a woman who touched many lives with her service.